THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) The assessment of forest cover in the country is done by Forest Survey of India (FSI) on a biennial basis. The first such survey was done in the year 1987. The forest cover in 1987 was found to be 6,40,819 sq. km. which is 19.49 per cent of the total geographical area. As per the latest "State of Forest Report (SFR)-2003" the forest cover in 2003 is 6,78,333 sq. km, which is 20.64 per cent of geographical area. Similarly, mangrove cover of the country was also assessed for the first time in 1987 and was found to be 4046 sq. km. The latest mangrove cover of the country as per the "State of Forest Report (SFR)-2003" is 4461 sq. km. No separate assessment of wetlands in quantitative terms has been made.

(b) Under the "Integrated Forest Protection Scheme", financial assistance is provided to States and Union Territories primarily for strengthening of infrastructure for protection of forests. The financial assistance provided to States and Union Territories during the year 2002-03 was Rs. 45.82 crores, in 2003-04 was Rs. 24.08 crores and in the year 2004-05 was Rs. 54.06 crores. Similarly, the Ministry is implementing "National Afforestation Programme" (NAP) Scheme for regeneration of degraded forests and in adjoining forest lands during Tenth Five Year Plan. During the last 3 years in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-03 to 2004-05), 573 'Forest Development Agency' (FDA) projects have been approved to cover a project area of 7.97 lakh hectares.

(c) The total financial allocation in the Tenth Five Year Plan for 'Integrated Forest Protection Scheme' is Rs. 445 crores whereas the total financial allocation in the Tenth Five Year Plan under the 'National Afforestation Programme Scheme' is Rs. 1,115 crores.

Death of lions in GIR Sanctuary

346. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:
SHRI VIJAYJ. DARDA:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that eight Asiatic lions have died in Gir forest since August this year;

(b) if so, what are the causes of these sudden deaths;

(c) how many Asiatic lions are at present there in the Sanctuary in Girnar district; and

(d) whether wild-life like lions are adequately protected there?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) As per the information received from the State Government of Gujarat, twelve Asiatic Lions have died since August this year, of which ten died due to natural causes, while 2 died of poisoning by local people.

(c) There is no district named Girnar. Gir Sanctuary and National Park is located in Junagadh and Amreli districts. Asiatic Lion are found in the sanctuary and its adjoining areas in Junagadh, Amreli and Bhavnagar districts. As per population estimates conducted during April, 2005, there are 359+10 Asiatic Lions in the area.

(d) Asiatic Lions in Gir and adjoining area are adequately protected through patrolling by local staff supported by wireless network, mobile squads, checking nakas, awareness education, eco-development programmes and provision of compensation for loss of cattle and injury or death of human being.

Construction of Vasant Kunj Mall

347. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:
SHRI HARISH RAWAT:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is constructing Vasant Kunj Mall illegally on ridge land and water catchments area where no construction or ground water withdrawal is allowed/ permissible;

(b) if so, the action taken/proposed to betaken against DDA for damaging ridge/water catchments area and to stop the construction of Mall; and

(c) what is the policy of Government to remove illegal encroachments/ constructions from green areas?